

grounds and without reasons. Do not say any more that everybody swears to lies; that whole neighborhoods conspire to perjury and fraud, and that the very officers of your own selection and appointment join to defraud the Government. Do not say this if you cannot prove it. If you can prove it, punish the offenders as the law requires.

There is such a thing as official jaundice, that blinds the eye, darkening the mind, and prejudices the judgment; that looks for evil in all things and all men, and the outlook from the high places of the Pension Office seem to be of the most melancholic and bilious hue.

A little healthy exercise; a little more mingling with actual living men and women; a little more faith in human nature and less in official nature, would soon restore the patient to a normal, uncolored, undistorted vision; to better digestion; to a more hopeful frame of mind, and an appreciation of the fact that this world is not absolutely a failure, and that it will continue to go on even should the new bill for the creation of sixty travelling members of the medical staff of the Commissioner of Pensions be defeated, as we hope it will.

#### Payment of Bounties to Soldiers and their Heirs

The appropriation for this purpose ceased on the 30th of June, 1877. Claims are piled up in the Second Auditor's office, and no money to pay them.

Yet Congress has been in session since last October, quarreling over all sorts of things; but the Committee on Appropriations has not found time to report and pass this bill to meet the just debts of the Government.

Is it not time to do justice? And is not this delay useless and unnecessary?

#### The Commissioner's Bill.

We print in full, for the examination of our numerous readers, the bill prepared by the Commissioner of Pensions and introduced into the House of Representatives by the Hon. A. V. Rice, of Ohio.

This gentleman will hardly assume the paterfamilias of this measure, when he shall have thoroughly studied its purpose and effects. However severe may have appeared our criticism upon this measure heretofore, a careful examination and dissection of its aims and ends will show good reason for much severer terms. If this bill, or anything like it, should pass Congress, the title should be changed so as to fit the bill. It should be entitled "A bill to diminish the number of pensioners at the caprice of the Commissioner; to prevent poor and disabled claimants from presenting their cases; to create a medical aristocracy, and to centralize all jurisdiction in pension matters in Washington."

We have in previous numbers stated the palpable defects in the system proposed, but this bill comes now with the full weight of the Pension Office behind it and crushes out the rights of hundreds and thousands of men the most deserving of all who have claims against the United States.

It seems as if it was an inevitable fact, that as soon as a man becomes an officer of the Government, he forgets that governments are not constituted for themselves but for the benefit of the people who make them. At once there arises an assertion of a distinct difference between the interest of the people and the Government. Mr. Bentley has forgotten that the pension laws were made for the benefit of the pensioners, not to accommodate Commissioners and clerks. These latter are only the machinery to bring about an end, but not the end itself.

The one thing which the law contemplates is

to give the relief pledged by the nation as quickly and as safely as possible; to give all possible facilities to the wounded and disabled of all classes to present and prove their claims before the inexorable death, which hangs around them, makes such relief unavailing. This is one branch of the service in which a false economy is a crime. Delay is cruelty, and postponement is frequently starvation.

Above all men the Commissioner of Pensions should be the last to lend himself to any scheme which would unnecessarily hinder or delay the speedy settlement of these claims. He is in office as the guardian and nearest friend of the soldier, the widow and orphan; the agent of the nation to see that its bounty is justly and rapidly handed over to proper recipients.

That is the high tenor of his commission, but he has fallen sadly below it when he listened to the adviser who shaped the present bill.

We propose to demonstrate from the bill itself that it is a most ingenious contrivance to heap up delay, cost and expense upon claimants of pension and those who now enjoy pensions; that it will build up a class of favorite officers at large salaries and unlimited expense, to travel over this country in all pleasant places with Uncle Sam to foot the bills; that it gives dangerous power to the head of the office; that it cannot but delay, hinder, and in many cases totally deny the opportunity of hearing just claims; that it slurs the truthfulness, honesty, and intelligence of the existing examining surgeons; that it substitutes a slow, self-important and wholly irresponsible body of men in their place, and that it has not even the paltry excuse of saving money to the United States.

It is a measure to magnify the Pension Office and its employees; to centralize the whole system here at Washington; to escape the wholesome effect of neighborhood watchfulness, and to establish petty tribunals of unlimited power and unlimited arrogance all over the country.

Now, without any desire to state things extravagantly, these are our ideas as to the purpose and effect of Mr. Bentley's bill. Therefore it is that we throw into this opposition to it our full strength, and intend if we can to defeat it.

We now take it up section by section, and will see if it deserves the criticism we have given; and we ask every one of our readers to read over carefully each section of this bill and then consider our comments upon it.

Section 1 provides for districting the United States into not more than sixty districts, for the designation of "posts" or places where examinations shall be had and testimony taken in pension cases. At least one annual session of the commission shall be had at each post, and more if practicable.

To this we say that even the maximum number of sixty is wholly insufficient to make the examinations required to be made and do justice either to the United States or the claimant, and that it will be impossible for such commission, in many districts, to attend at more than one post.

Section 2. That the commission shall consist of one pension surgeon and one clerk from the pension office; that these shall make all the medical and surgical examinations authorized by the pension laws, and shall receive and collect all testimony in pension cases (*claims included*), under such rules as the Commissioner shall prescribe. Before this commission all pensioners, claimants of pension and their witnesses must *personally* appear, unless the Commissioner of Pensions shall consider it impossible or a great hardship, in which case the testimony or examination may be made in such form as the Commissioner shall prescribe, "but no additional expense to the Government shall thereby be incurred."

This most cruel and unjust provision simply means that if a claimant is bed-ridden, or disabled from travel to the "post," or absolutely a pauper and without means, then he must pay in some way the expenses of his examination, or be cut off from his claim. Those who have friends or means or comparative health can go to the board and be examined at the cost of the Government, but those who are too poor or disabled entirely must pay the commission for coming to them, or pay such other officer such fees as the Commissioner may prescribe. The proposition is an outrage upon humanity.

But the concluding sentence of this section deserves notice.

Notwithstanding that the Commissioner of Pensions has by this section created a special commission to replace the present examining surgeons for the avowed reason that he does not trust them and therefore supersedes them by another set deserving more confidence, we find that he cannot trust those whom he has thus created, for at the end of this section he reserves the right, at his will and pleasure, to call together a board of three to make these same medical and surgical examinations.

Now let it be remembered that all these examinations are required to be in writing, to state, not opinions, but *facts actually observed*, to become the basis of opinion here in Washington by the medical referee, and it becomes difficult to imagine the necessity or excuse for three men to do what one *competent* man ought to perform. Or does he mean to admit the probable incompetency of these new appointees?

It looks exceedingly like the multiplication of offices, and the increase of travel fees.

Section 3 provides for the appointment of pension surgeons, not to exceed sixty, with not less than five years active practice in medicine and surgery, and, if possible, who have had experience as army and navy surgeons, to hold commissions at the pleasure of the Secretary of the Interior, and with a salary of — dollars.

There is no provision for their appointment from the limits of any district; nothing to require them to be resident any where; no limitation of numbers to be selected from any State or Territory, and they may be all selected, even, from the District of Columbia.

Mr. Bentley has already given his opinion in his report as to the assumed disadvantage of an examining surgeon living in the neighborhood of those whom he examines, and has instanced wonderful results obtained by translating Dr. Clarke from Wisconsin to New York, (at a cost of nearly one thousand dollars per month,) so that it may safely be presumed that all these limitations are purposely left out; and, taking this in connection with the travelling expenses allowed elsewhere in the bill, he makes out a very pretty opportunity for his special friends to travel where they wish at Government expense.

Some pension surgeon residing, when at home, in Maine is assigned, we will say, to California and makes his trip at the expense of the United States; or Dr. Clarke, of Wisconsin, visits Florida.

In the course of a few years, with a little friendship at headquarters, a clever fellow could travel over all the desirable parts of the United States under this economical bill.

The salary is left blank, but it cannot be less than \$3,000 per annum. No physician or surgeon, such as the scheme of this bill demands, no one fit to supersede the present system, can be hired to give, as he must give, all his time to this duty for a less sum, for he will have no time for his private practice, and the duty is onerous and disagreeable.

Section 4 continues the biennial examinations, and provides further, that special examinations of any invalid pensioner may be had "at such times and as often as (the Commis-